

Sudan protesters tear down roadblocks, want army to resume talks

Author:

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Fri, 2019-05-17 15:26

KHARTOUM: Hundreds of demonstrators worked to clear away bricks and debris Friday, after military rulers demanded that roadblocks which have paralysed parts of Khartoum be dismantled before talks on a new transitional body can resume.

The ruling military council suspended crucial talks Wednesday with protest leaders for 72 hours, insisting that the security in the capital had deteriorated after demonstrators erected roadblocks on several avenues. The council's decision came as army generals and protest leaders were due to meet to finalise the make-up of a new body to govern Sudan for a transitional period of three years.

The issue is the thorniest to have come up in ongoing talks on installing civilian rule after the generals took over following the ouster of autocratic president Omar al-Bashir last month.

But for the final talks to happen the military council chief, General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, demanded that protesters dismantle roadblocks, open bridges and railway lines connecting the capital and "stop provoking security forces".

In the early hours of Friday, hundreds of demonstrators chanting revolutionary slogans tore down roadblocks on Nile Street, a key avenue, that had paralysed downtown Khartoum this week.

"We have removed the bricks... but if they do not respond to our demands then we will bring the bricks again," protester Sumeya Abdrahman told AFP while demonstrators cleared the debris.

Later on Friday an AFP correspondent who toured the area saw car traffic resume normally on Nile Street.

Protesters had erected the barricades to pressure the military rulers when talks began on Monday, but the roadblocks triggered clashes between demonstrators and security forces according to witnesses.

The military council said roadblocks are "totally unacceptable", but the generals will allow barricades set up by protesters outside the army headquarters to remain and a sit-in there to continue.

Talks between the two sides achieved significant breakthroughs on Monday, but were marred by violence which left five protesters and an army major dead. Protesters blamed the paramilitary Rapid Support Force, but Burhan said there were "armed elements among demonstrators who were shooting at security forces".

On Friday, Sudanese protesters attended prayers at the sit-in outside the military headquarters, sitting on mats placed in rows on the street.

"We have all the respect for the army and the RSF. They are our partners in the revolution," said the prayer leader as teenagers sprinkled water on

worshippers gathered under the scorching sun.

As the prayers ended, worshippers chanted "freedom, peace, justice," the catchcry of the protest movement that brought down Bashir.

Women worshippers, who offered prayers in separate tents chanted: "Peaceful, peaceful! Civilian, Civilian," referring to the protesters' demand for civilian rule.

"I don't care about the heat ... What I care about is to finish this thing (the political impasse)," said protester Mohamed Ismail as he poured cold water on his head to get relieve from the mid-day sun.

The Alliance for Freedom and Change, which is leading the protest movement, said the move to suspend talks was "regrettable".

"It ignores the developments achieved in negotiations so far... and the fact that Wednesday's meeting was to finalise the agreement, which would have stopped the escalations such as roadblocks."

The protest movement vowed to press on with the sit-in, and has urged supporters to converge at the army headquarters where thousands have been camped out for weeks.

Protesters are demanding a civilian-led transition, which the generals have steadfastly resisted since bowing to demonstrators' demands in toppling Bashir.

During the first two days of talks the two sides had agreed on an overall civilian structure, including a three-year period for the full transfer of power to a civilian administration.

They had also agreed that parliament be composed of 300 members for the transition, with around two-thirds from the protest alliance and the rest drawn from other political groups.

But the make-up of the new sovereign council has been the toughest part of the negotiations, with the two sides so far proposing different compositions of the body.

The council is expected to take all key decisions concerning national issues and the generals want it to be military-led, while the protesters insist it have a civilian majority.

The body is expected to form a transitional civilian government, which would then prepare for the first post-Bashir election after changeover period ends.





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Protests

Sudan protesters vow to press on after talks suspended
Sudanese forces clear protesters with gunfire; talks suspended for 72 hours

[UAE minister blames Iran for heightened tensions in the region](#)

Fri, 2019-05-17 17:15

LONDON: Iranian behavior has led to the current heightened tensions in the region, a UAE minister has said, reiterating comments made earlier this week.

In an interview with CNN aired Thursday, Anwar Gargash, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, said a sabotage attack against four oil tankers off the Emirates' coast had come at a "sensitive and difficult period in the region."

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[@AnwarGargash](#) tells [@BeckyCNN](#) the [@UAE](#) is investigating recent incidents in the Gulf alongside France and the U.S. and calls for dealing with things in a "mature, rational" way. [#Iran](#)
pic.twitter.com/onQFm9zQnd

– Connect the World (@CNNConnect) [May 16, 2019](#)

"We are where we are largely because of Iran behaviour," Gargash said. "This is a behaviour that is not new to the region. This is a behaviour that has been basically compiling and clearly right now that – American sanctions on Iran are biting."

The attacks on the tankers came amid escalating rhetoric between the US and its Gulf allies on one side and Iran on the other. The US has deployed an aircraft carrier and B-52 bombers to the Gulf in response to an unspecified Iranian threat.

Saudi Arabia said Iran-backed Houthi rebels on Tuesday attacked an oil pipeline in the Kingdom with drones.

The investigations into the tanker attack were on going, Gargash said, adding that in a few days "we should know what took place."

"We are collaborating with France, and the United States, and other friends are also offering their help," he said. "Clearly this is a very, very serious

incident because it affects maritime commerce, and it comes also at a very very, what I would call a very sensitive and difficult period in the region.”

The minister said all parties have an interest in deescalating the situation and “dealing with things in a mature, rational way.”

But he added the onus was on Iran, not Washington, to deescalate the situation.

“Iranian behaviour over the last decade or two has led us to where we are today,” he said. “There’s very little trust in the region.”



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UAE slams Iranian aggression but calls for calm amid oil tanker attack investigation
Saudi oil tankers sabotaged off UAE coast as Trump warns Iran of ‘suffering greatly’ if Tehran attacks

UK warns British-Iranian dual nationals against visiting Iran

Fri, 2019-05-17 17:09

LONDON: London warned British-Iranian dual nationals against all travel to Iran on Friday due to Tehran's "continued arbitrary detention and mistreatment" of such citizens.

The move comes as Britain continues to try to secure the release from jail of dual national Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe.

Tehran has also recently sentenced an Iranian British Council employee, Aras Amiri, to 10 years in prison on charges of spying.

In a statement, the Foreign Office said British-Iranian dual nationals faced an "unacceptably higher risk of arbitrary detention and mistreatment" than nationals of other countries.

"The security forces may be suspicious of people with British connections, including those with links to institutions based in the UK, or which receive public funds from, or have perceived links to, the British government," the statement said.

British-Iranian mother Zaghari-Ratcliffe was arrested by Iranian authorities in 2016 as she was leaving Tehran.

Zaghari-Ratcliffe, who worked for the Thomson Reuters Foundation, was put on trial and is now serving a five-year jail sentence for allegedly trying to topple the Iranian government.

"Dual nationals face an intolerable risk of mistreatment if they visit Iran," Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt said.

"Despite the UK providing repeated opportunities to resolve this issue, the Iranian regime's conduct has worsened.

"Having exhausted all other options, I must now advise all British-Iranian dual nationals against travelling to Iran.

"The dangers they face include arbitrary detention and lack of access to basic legal rights, as we have seen in the case of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, who has been separated from her family since 2016."

The Iranian government does not recognise dual nationality, meaning the Foreign Office's ability to provide consular support is limited.

Hunt added: "Regrettably, I must also offer a message of caution to Iranian nationals resident in the UK – but who return to visit family and friends – especially where the Iranian government may perceive them to have personal links to UK institutions or the British government."



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UK raises threat level for personnel in Iraq due to Iran risk: Sky News Iran sentences British Council worker to 10 years for spying for UK

[Palestinians plan Eurovision alternative](#)

Author:

Fri, 2019-05-17 00:14

RAMALLAH: Israel hosts the Eurovision song contest this week and the thousands of visitors who come with it, but Palestinians are planning an alternative they hope draws attention to the country's occupation.

The alternative to Eurovision, called "Globalvision," will be held on Saturday, the same day of the song contest's finals in Tel Aviv.

Pro-Palestinian campaigners say the idea for it came from the fact that they do not want to simply oppose the Israeli event but host a positive

alternative.

Globalvision parties are expected in London, Dublin, the Palestinian city of Ramallah and Haifa in northern Israel, which has a significant Arab population.

No European TV channels are expected to feature the events but they will be streamed online, with organizers encouraging people to tune in instead of watching Eurovision.

Among those expected to take part is influential British musician and producer Brian Eno, along with prominent Palestinian musicians.

The Haifa event will feature a drag queen and other performers who will fulfil the desire for the famed Eurovision kitsch, said Najwan Berekdar, one of the organizers.

BACKGROUND

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She said the aim was to create an “alternative musical event that highlights the original values of Eurovision, which is inclusion and diversity.”

Tel Aviv hosts the largest Gay Pride event in the Middle East every year and the city has a cosmopolitan feel.

This tolerance of homosexuality is often trumpeted by Israeli officials, who compare it to many Arab states where homosexuality is criminalized.

Critics say this amounts to “pinkwashing” – seeking to use its pro-gay attitudes to downplay its occupation of Palestinian territory.

Israel occupied the West Bank and East Jerusalem in the 1967 Six-Day War. It later annexed East Jerusalem in a move never accepted by the international community.

More than 600,000 Israelis live in settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem in communities considered illegal under international law.

“Israel is using art and culture to whitewash occupation,” Berekdar said.

Apart from Globalvision, Palestinians have been seeking to have their voices heard in other ways.

Madonna has received criticism for her planned performance at Eurovision on Saturday, including a plea to cancel from the mother of a Palestinian journalist shot dead by Israeli forces during protests and clashes along the

Gaza-Israel border last year.

The US pop star has since said she will reject boycott calls and headline the event.

Anti-occupation NGO Breaking the Silence has also erected a billboard in Israel with the slogan "Dare to Dream of Freedom," playing on this year's Eurovision slogan "Dare to Dream."

And in Gaza on Tuesday, musicians performed in the shadow of a building destroyed by an Israeli air strike in response to Palestinian rocket fire earlier this month.

Tuesday night saw hackers succeed in flashing a fake rocket attack warning during the webcast of a Eurovision semifinal in an incident Israel's public broadcaster blamed on Hamas, the Islamist movement that runs the Gaza Strip.

There was however no comment from Hamas on the allegation.

Back in Tel Aviv, Israeli police have increased their presence ahead of the event with a spokesman saying "hundreds of police officers, special patrol units and private security guards (are) securing the beach area, Eurovillage and the area of the expo."

On stage in Tel Aviv, all eyes will be on Iceland's entry for a potential protest.

The band Hatari, who dress in so-called BDSM outfits – bondage clothing including leather and whips – have been critical of Israel.

They have previously challenged Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to a Glima, a Nordic folk wrestling match, and could still seek to highlight the Palestinians' plight during the extravaganza.



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[Eurovision Song Contest](#)

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Palestinians want Jerusalem cut from Eurovision videos
Gaza artists call on Eurovision singers to boycott Israel

[Syrian refugees struggle to make ends meet during Ramadan](#)

Author:

Thu, 2019-05-16 23:31

AMMAN: For Um Nabil, a 46-year-old Syrian refugee living in Irbid in Jordan, preparing the iftar dinner on the first day of Ramadan was a challenge. With three children to raise alone and with little money left, she had to borrow the funds to buy half a chicken to cook for the meal.

Um Nabil's husband left for Syria to collect his mother after his father died but has not returned for three years. Not only did her husband leave her with her three children, she also has to deal with his second wife and their child.

Despite her difficult life, Um Nabil told Arab News that her situation is

much better than some. She looks out of the kitchen window and points to her three Syrian neighbors. "They live in even smaller apartments and God knows how bad their situation is."

A few vegetables can be seen outside the kitchen window. Um Nabil has learned how to grow vegetables without soil and has been able to produce enough for her family as well as sell anything extra. She regularly plants lettuce, tomatoes and beans.

Last year Um Nabil volunteered with a local agency which gave her 13 Jordanian dinars (\$18) a day in return for her help.

This year with her husband gone, she has to figure out ways to pay the steep cost of the rent at 140 Jordanian dinars per month. She depends on the monthly food stipend from the World Food Program for the amount of 60 Jordanian dinars, less than half the cost of rent alone.

As the time for breaking the fast approaches, Um Nabil's children gather in what they call the sitting room, a room with old furniture that is in need of repair. Wafa, the oldest daughter at 17, said that Ramadan was much better in Syria: "All that is left of Ramadan is sitting together and eating rice and other things."

Um Nabil recalls the dinners she used to prepare with many dishes and fresh juices. "We used to get what we wanted without thinking of money."

Asked why she does not return, Um Nabil said that although her house was not badly destroyed in Dera'a, her friends advised her not to go back. "We communicate a lot and they tell me don't come back. Life is not easy in Syria."

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) says that 137,539 registered Syrian refugees live in Irbid while Jordanian government sources say that the number is closer to 250,000.

Since the opening of the Jaber crossing point, 16,700 of the 671,000 registered Syrian refugees living in Jordan have returned. Jordan says that the actual number of refugees (both registered and unregistered) is more than 1 million.

Jordan's promise to provide work permits for Syrians has failed to address the economic problems facing them with only 40,000 documented permits issued, according to official sources.

International agencies say that the average annual income of Syrian refugees in Amman, Irbid and Zarqa is about 3,000 Jordanian dinars while in Mafraq and some of the refugee camps the average income is 1,000 Jordanian dinars.

Nearly 98 percent of the income of Syrian families goes to pay rent, which ranges from 120 to 140 Jordanian dinars a month, according to a study prepared by the Norwegian Agency Fafo.

UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi has issued an international

appeal for donor help to support Syrian families in countries such as Jordan during Ramadan. "Ramadan is a month of compassion, renewal and service. The resilience of refugees inspires us and reminds us that all actions that we take, big or small, can have an impact."

The family of Um Nabil has no money and so pays little attention to the many Ramadan deserts available locally.

While some Jordanians continue to suffer economically, overall there is a wide gap between Syrian refugees and most Jordanians.

The long lines outside the Syrian ice-cream store Bakdash or Nafisa sweets in Amman, and other high-quality restaurants opened by Syrian entrepreneurs largely for Jordanian and expat clients, reflects the gap that has become more obvious during Ramadan.



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Saudi medical volunteers welcome in Ramadan at camp for Syrian refugees
To fast or not? Syrians in Raqqa mark relaxed Ramadan